

Myths and Facts

Special Education
and

English as a Second
Language

Special education is more important than ESL.

Fact: Students have the right to the best educational opportunities that the school system can offer. If the child has a language deficiency caused by second language acquisition, it will limit the amount of progress possible in the SPED class. At the same time, if the child is not served by SPED, s/he might not reach his/her potential.

Since it takes approximately 2 to 3 years for the ESL students to become orally fluent, it is best to wait that long for testing for SPED services.

- Fact: The ESL student does not have to be fluent in spoken language to benefit from the services provided by SPED, if warranted. Think of the time wasted if the student needed SPED services.

So, there is no need to wait to test the ESL child for SPED.

- Fact: Students who are learning a second language experience a silent period (input going in, language not generally coming out) that may last for 3 to 6+ months. Unless the student's disability is obvious, this silent period needs to be considered before scheduling intake testing for SPED services.

The ESL teacher cannot be a part of the IEP team.

Fact: The ESL teacher/professional should always be a part of the IEP team. S/he should be the source of information related to linguistic expectations for second language learners. The IEP team should be comprised of the best professionals to contribute input for the good of the student.

The SPED department is not obligated to use ESL professionals in S-team and IEP Team meetings.

- Fact: The child needs the best input for determination services. The ESL professional is the linguistic expert for these teams. The child deserves the best teams possible to determine the best services possible for success.

These students are in America and should be tested in English.

- Fact: The focus needs to be objective instruction for the child. The purpose of the testing is to determine best services. For example, if the test would be more valid in Spanish and that is a possibility, then the test should be administered in Spanish.

If there is a translator available, we should always use him/her when testing.

- Fact: This may or may not be to the best interest of the child. Cultural factors may inhibit the translator from being the best suited to this position. The school psychologist's goal is to attain the most valid test results possible.

Questions or Comments

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